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Indonesia: Train journalists to write about reproductive health

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Indonesia Dissemination

Train Journalists to Write about Reproductive Health

OR Summary 16

After Indonesian journalists received background information and training on reproductive health issues, the quality of their coverage improved. However, continued efforts are needed to provide media representatives with ideas for news stories and feature articles and training in use of research findings.

Background

After governmental control over the media was liberalized in 1998, Indonesian journalists had a new mandate to explore new issues and foster public debate. Several studies had found evidence that women's health worsened during 1997-99. Yet media coverage of this topic was limited and superficial.

To increase press coverage of reproductive health (RH) topics, the Population Council conducted an 18-month media project in collaboration with the State Ministry for Women's Empowerment and other key agencies.



The project focused on improving RH knowledge and reporting skills among 22 print journalists. Major project activities were:

(1) a briefing for senior editors; (2) a four-day training workshop; (3) five press briefings on trends in women's health, effects of violence on women's RH, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), male involvement in RH, and adolescents' RH; (4) wide distribution of seven news releases and three sets of press kits; and (5) a competition for the best RH coverage.

To measure changes in the journalists' knowledge, pre- and post-tests were administered at each press briefing. Project staff monitored RH coverage in 22 major newspapers, magazines, and tabloids. All articles were coded according to topic, length, type of article, and use of research findings.

Findings

- ◆ About 7 percent of the 1,836 articles on RH published in the Indonesian press from September 1999 through September 2000 were directly linked to project activities.
- ◆ Journalists who attended the training workshop published 30 news and feature articles on project-related themes within three months of the workshop.
- ◆ Large circulation newspapers and magazines used the project materials to write news and feature articles more than smaller publications. Two daily newspapers, *Media Indonesia* and *Kompas* with 350,000 and 400,000 readers respectively, published the largest number of articles on reproductive health.
- ◆ HIV/AIDS was the most frequently covered RH issue in both newspapers and magazines, followed by safe motherhood, child health, reproductive tract infections, adolescent RH, and violence against women.
- ◆ Journalists' knowledge of RH issues increased slightly after the press briefings. Most articles from the journalists who received training cited RH information accurately and used multiple sources. However, some articles, especially from untrained journalists, were inaccurate, unclear, or too narrow in scope.

- ◆ The potential of media coverage to change policies and programs is illustrated by one immediate outcome. Managers of a refugee camp requested additional RH supplies for refugee women after articles on RH among refugee women in eastern Indonesia were published.

Policy Implications

- ◆ Research agencies should explain research findings to print and broadcast journalists to ensure accurate coverage.
- ◆ Indonesian agencies should collaborate to ensure that journalists receive a regular flow of information about reproductive health in order to promote public debate on key topics.
- ◆ Actions that can improve media coverage of RH issues include: working closely with individual journalists, preparing background materials in the local language, providing training on use of research findings, and orienting senior editors to the importance of RH.

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Firmansyah, Wanda, Sahar Hegazi, Siti Rokhmawati Darwisyah, and Lila Amaliah. December 2000. Increasing Coverage of Reproductive Health Issues in the Indonesian Print Media: Final Report. For further information, please contact: Population Council, Menara Dea 3rd floor, Suite 303, Jl. Mega Kuningan Barat Kav.E4.3, No.1, Jakarta 12950, Indonesia. Tel: 62-21 5761011; Fax: 62-21 5761013; E-mail: ompcjt@cbn.net.id.

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